

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

Today's featured poet is Martin Steingesser, Portland's former poet laureate. His ecstatic poem celebrates a morning on the road, paying tribute along the way to two American poets noted for their own ecstatic celebrations.

Today, the Traffic Signals All Changed for Me

by Martin Steingesser

It's all language, I am thinking
on my way over the drawbridge to South Portland,
driving into a wishbone blue, autumn sky, maple
red, aspen yellow—oaks, evergreens
stretching out in sunlight. Isn't this all
message and sign, singing to us?
When I open ears, listen with eyes
wide open, the world tumbles in, suddenly
a rush through my body, how tires zummmmm
across a bridge grating, sending vibratos
along limbs, out fingers
and toes. Even these dead things
we make: cement walkways,
macadam streets, all our brick and steel
and rubber, even these are alive. Sometimes
I feel so empty. Today, I am filling up, the way
this Indian Summer morning keeps fattening
on sunlight, feelings, words frothing like yeast.
Blue sky rises in my blood, geese
and monarchs migrating through; my love's an open field,
meadows of goldfinch, Anne's lace, new moon
and crow laughing...Tornadoes
collapse in a breath, oceans curl at my toes, galaxies
exploding in my heart. Am I going loco? I pull over
onto the roadside, cars and trucks whizzing by.
I can't get places I thought I was going. I think of old Walt,
quadrupeds and birds stucco'd all over. Why not?
And you, too, Allen, gay, locomotive sunflower laureate,
both of you, among the leaves, in your all-star colors,
hitting all the curves, belting poems
out of the century. O look!—this is what's happening.

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